

Touching From A Distance by deandratb

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Summary:

Post S1 insomniac!Hopper ficlet; mornings are for coffee and contemplation yearning. *She's holding his hand, his exhausted brain thinks. His exhausted brain is a bit of a moron.*

Touching From A Distance

Author's Note:

Earlier disclaimer still applies: I haven't seen S2 yet, so if anything is not canon-compliant, it's purely by accident and I'm unaware of it.

When Hopper sleeps, he dreams of Sara.

Sometimes, he's still married and sober, tucking her in before he reads her a story. She liked it best when he did all the voices.

Other times, she's in her hospital room, that last day, when they didn't know it would be their last. She's giggling weakly at cartoons while he holds her hand.

But the worst nights, the nights when he wakes up shouting and then drinks until dawn, are the ones when he dreams that he saves her. Where they caught it sooner, where the radiation was enough...where he pushes the hospital staff out of the way and does CPR and it **works**.

Those make him wish he'd never woken up.

He fought as hard as he did to save Will Byers because the boy is in his town, because he's Joyce's son--mostly, just because he needed saving. Hopper couldn't protect his little girl, but he'll be damned if any more kids are lost.

Not on his watch. Even if it takes everything he has left.

He still wakes up shouting, though. It hasn't stopped the dreams. He doubts anything ever will.

So Hopper doesn't sleep.

Joyce taps on the cracked window of Hopper's Blazer, peering drowsily at him as he blinks at her. Somehow, she doesn't startle

him--he wakes without jolting, as though he weren't asleep at all.

"You want coffee?"

She doesn't ask what he's doing outside her house, instead of inside his own. She resists the urge to scold him for sleeping sitting up rather than in the perfectly good bed he must be avoiding...he'll be facing a world of hurt when that awkward position catches up to him.

Instead, she steps back silently while he gets out of the car and follows her in.

"Hey, Chief."

Jonathan's making breakfast--smells like scrambled eggs, Hopper decides as he stops just outside the kitchen.

Her eldest son seems remarkably unphased by his arrival. If Joyce told him to make extra for Hop, he'd probably just grab a plate and carry on. The kid's practically a second parent at this point; it shows.

"Hey."

He hears a loud bang down the hall, what must be an opened door hitting the wall behind it, as Will comes toward him dressed for school.

"Morning, sweetheart." Joyce rests a hand on his shoulder as he passes by. It's as much a gesture to reassure herself as it is affectionate...Hopper wonders if anyone else can tell the difference.

If his daughter were alive, he would be the same way, needing to constantly verify the miracle of her existence. So he gets it.

"Morning," Will says to his mom, eyes widening when he finally notices Hopper. The boy offers him a tentative smile.

Joyce grabs a mug and pours Hop coffee, passing it his way so smoothly that it feels like they do this all the time. "Milk's in the fridge, sugar's over here," she adds on her way to fixing her own cup.

He considers waiting until she's done, and the counter's empty for him to use--but where would be the fun in that? Instead, he joins her, letting his shoulder bump hers as he sets his mug down.

"Sugar?"

"Yeah." Their fingers brush as she hands it to him; they both pretend not to notice.

"Thanks."

Hopper's still half-asleep, and when he jostles his cup a little, hot liquid sloshing onto the counter, he barely feels it hit the back of his hand.

Joyce sees it right away--she's such a mom, he thinks, grinning as she turns away to grab a towel.

He loses the smirk instantly when she reaches for his hand without thinking, tugging him toward the sink to run cold water over their joined fingers. "You okay?"

She's holding his hand, his exhausted brain thinks. His exhausted brain is a bit of a moron.

"I'm fine," he says, tugging his hand free. "I'm not five."

"God, right. Sorry. Reflex." She smiles apologetically, and Hopper feels like a jerk. He knows she didn't mean anything by it.

It's not her fault that that's part of the problem.

"Yeah, I should really go."

"But--your coffee..."

He lifts the cup more carefully this time, gulps half of it down just to placate her. Then flees. "See you later, Joyce," he says without making eye contact on his way out.

Frowning, she watches him leave--offering Jonathan a wordless shrug when he looks at the closing front door, then at her. Hopper must

have somewhere to be.

He slumps back into the front seat of his truck, rubbing a hand over his face. He has to stop this.

The fact that he can only sleep in Joyce Byers' driveway is fucked up, and it's starting to fuck him up in ways that he can't keep hidden. Obviously, he thinks, looking at the bright pink splotch on his hand.

Idly running his fingers over it, Hopper closes his eyes. He can feel her hand wrapped around his without even trying.

Yeah, this has got to stop.

Otherwise, one of these days...he's gonna do something really stupid.

Author's Note:

Title borrowed from "Transmission" by Joy Division.